Cinderella and Her Sisters in the English Curriculum
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minds to which we look for our definitions of what both science and religion are, have not only not seen such a conflict but have clearly seen and clearly stated that there is none.

This is structurally a very important paragraph. *Record in your notebook exactly what its relation to paragraphs 7–14 is, and also what point it marks in the structure of the address.*

B. Student notebook entry:

15. This paragraph is a summary of paragraphs 7–14 and concludes the first main division of the essay.

CINDERELLA AND HER SISTERS IN THE ENGLISH CURRICULUM

ROBERT L. RAMSAY

It is customary to use the annual meetings of great bodies like the National Council of Teachers of English as suitable occasions for the announcement of important discoveries. The discovery which I am going to announce is hardly worthy of the time and place, but I feel sure that it will be of interest to this audience, because it concerns the interpretation of a classic known to all of us from our earliest youth, and it has a direct bearing on the problems of our English curriculum. Like all great discoveries, this one seems very simple, after it is discovered, and the only wonder is that no one, apparently, has ever noticed its obvious truth before. It has to do with the esoteric interpretation of that ancient romance of our childhood, the story of Cinderella.

The tale of the oppressed and misunderstood little kitchen-maid who suffered so many things from the jealousy of her two beautiful stepsisters and from the short-sighted policy of her unkind stepmother, of the wise and benevolent old witch who transformed her into a reigning beauty of fashionable society by the gift of proper clothes and a pumpkin coach, of the handsome young prince who met her first after the miraculous transformation had been effected and who so promptly and naturally fell in love with her, and finally of the wonderful glass slipper by means of which he identified the true Cinderella once again after she seemed to have been lost to him —all these familiar incidents have doubtless seemed to you merely the ingredients of an idle tale for the nursery, invented only for

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childish entertainment and delight; and such, indeed, they seemed to me until I was asked last summer to prepare this talk on the English curriculum. But no school teacher likes to think of anything as merely for entertainment and delight—anything from which it is impossible to extract edification, instruction, and reproof; and so I feel sure that you will be pleased when I tell you how it dawned upon me that Cinderella was really composed to convey a lesson in education—and that, too, a lesson especially intended for English teachers.

The reason why the message which the author of Cinderella meant to give to the world has been lost for so long is, I feel sure, simply that the real names of the two jealous stepsisters somehow disappeared from the original manuscript. When these are restored, the meaning of the story becomes as clear as daylight. I am convinced that one of these beautiful but somewhat selfish heroines was originally named Composition, and the other Literature. The misguided stepmother, who needed a lesson in the broadening of her interests and the revision of her scale of daughterly rights and values, is obviously one kind of English teacher. And the young prince whose attentions she tried so hard and so unsuccessfully to attract for her two eldest girls is, of course, the pupil in our English classes whose capricious fancy and wavering interest we all find it difficult enough at times to fix for our favorite subjects.

But the point of greatest significance in the story is the identification of Cinderella. The third sister, neglected and dressed in rags, with a liberal sprinkling of dust and ashes upon them, driven to stay in the kitchen and considered capable only of cleaning the pots and polishing the kettles of the household—who is she but the third member of our English family, the study of Language or Philology? She is the one who has in her province those disagreeable branches known as etymology and phonetics and grammar—the branches which we are oftenest called upon to defend and apologize for, and which we try hardest to keep in the background as much as we can when visitors are present. Sometimes we succeed so well that the visitors are not aware that there is a third daughter in the family at all. Language is thought of very commonly as a mere attendant on one or the other of the two popular sisters. If she is admitted to the parlor at all, she comes in either as an awkward handmaid to Com-

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position or an unhandy underservant to Literature. But she is always out of place in such a capacity.

The study of language never succeeds when it is made merely a means to an end, no matter how desirable that end may be, and just here, I believe, is the root of most of the dissatisfaction and discontent with the whole linguistic side of our English curriculum. Philology is never herself in servitude. Like any other science, she must have her worth and dignity as a pure science admitted and appreciated before she will render any real help as an applied science. Cinderella, I am sure, was never called in to hand about the teacups or help the young visitors on with their overshoes, without disgracing herself. She was thoroughly unhappy in the rôle of a servant, and the attitude which her sisters adopted toward her did little to improve the quality of her service.

Undeniably there is a certain air of condescension, to say the least, toward the linguistic side of English on the part both of Literature and Composition. The beautiful sister Literature is a fastidious girl, who prides herself above all things on her refinement and her sensitive nature. She cannot repress a shudder when Cinderella touches, with those big clumsy hands of hers, one of her beloved masterpieces. If the young prince declines to drink from her teacups, it was those awkward hands of Cinderella's on the delicate china that are to blame for his distaste. How often we have heard the sad tale of the unfortunate boy who was brutally compelled by his teacher to parse a passage of Shakespeare or diagram a sentence from Addison, whereupon he promptly conceived a lifelong antipathy for those writers and could never bear to open one of their works again! Probably the same boy was able to study botany and dissect plants in the laboratory without being driven to detest flowers. He may even have used a telescope and worked stiff problems in astronomy without turning against the stars. But poetry is different, and the fine aesthetic rapture with which, as we all know, our pupils approach it is infallibly blighted by a breath of philology.

The voluble critics who tell us so frequently nowadays how fatal a thing it is to mingle grammar with literature are rather inclined to deprecate the intrusion of facts of any kind. Even to explain the allusions is dangerous; dull details of meter or scansion are certain

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to destroy the charm; and dates, of course, are deadly. The fewer footnotes the better, and if some footnotes there must be, the best policy is probably to have them consist entirely of exclamation points. I think I had a student a few years ago who had been trained along those lines. In a thoughtless moment, I asked the class to write out the difference, as they saw it, between poetry and prose. This boy's answer came in as follows: "Poetry differs from prose chiefly in having a jagged appearance."

One seldom finds a student so admirably unhampered by technical training; and yet, strangely enough, I do not remember that this student exhibited any overpowering passion for poetry. Perhaps there is a certain fallacy, after all, about aiming too directly at inspiring our students with an appreciation for literature. Appreciation is a shy bird, and does not like to be aimed at. Like happiness, it is apt to escape us when it is pursued too eagerly. We achieve happiness oftenest, perhaps, when we work hard at the daily task without thinking about happiness at all; and just so I suspect the teacher who tries honestly to help his students *understand* a piece of literature, without attempting any direct assault upon their taste or admiration, is apt to score a higher percentage of genuine appreciation in the end.

But of course I realize that any such sentiments are grossly heretical nowadays. It is far more orthodox to blame the failure of the teacher of literature on an overplus of facts, especially if they be philological facts. The hue and cry against philology has almost become a formula in the hands of some of our younger journalists and essayists. An easy recipe for any number of clever articles on the shortcomings of English teachers would run about as follows: Tell how the enthusiasm of the future instructor is stifled by having to learn Aryan roots, phonetic laws, and variant readings; describe pathetically how he is forced to write a ponderous thesis which, as is well known, always consists of countless columns of statistics of dead and useless information; and, above all, abuse research and enlarge on the futility of the Ph.D.

A brilliant example of the type appeared in our own *English Journal* only last summer, in Dr. Burgum's article with the clever and characteristic title, "The Modern Dry-as-Dust." Let me quote

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just a sentence or two from his delightful description of the inmates of our graduate schools. He tells how "the holders of university fellowships steal forth like bats from their literary cubicles at nightfall, in quest of food among the shadows of some scurvy chophouse." These "pasty-faced individuals" have been "paralyzed by philology." "Become the shades of men in strange realms of Sanscrit roots and phonetic laws called graduate schools," they are "driven forth over the face of the land to instruct and discipline the wild energy of the rising generation."

It is obvious that Dr. Burgum, in spite of the fact that he has himself acquired the Ph.D. degree, did not have his imagination entirely stifled in the process. Indeed, I suspect that he got his remarkable gift of alliteration from the study of Anglo-Saxon poetry. But though Dr. Kemp Malone in another article in the *Journal* has shown that, as a matter of cold fact, only about 2 per cent or 3 per cent of the courses required for our modern Ph.D.'s are really concerned with Sanscrit roots and phonetic laws, it matters not to Dr. Burgum. A single course in phonetics is enough, no doubt, to unman the prospective teacher of youth and paralyze him for life. Let Cinderella once venture to stick her nose outside the kitchen door, and everything is over.

The saddest picture which I have yet seen of the dire results of linguistic study was presented in the same number of the *Journal* by a lady who signed herself "A Dean's Wife." This unimpeachable authority told of the behavior of a recent woman Ph.D. whom she had observed personally. The unfortunate girl, who came with the highest recommendations, proved to be thoroughly familiar with all the ancestry of Beowulf; she could, and did, "trace all the line of the Geats, the Danes, the Hygelacs (*sic*), the Scyldings, and of every family named in the whole poem." In fact, she apparently knew the answer to many a knotty problem that Professor Klaeber or Professor Belden would give his head to solve. But—and apparently as a direct result of her severe Ph.D. training—she wore her skirts disgracefully short; they actually came "halfway above her knees." I should have thought, just at first, that this rather testified to a remarkable modernity in the atmosphere of our graduate schools. But, no, it merely proves the ill effects of intensive philo-

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logical training. The exact connection, I must confess, between short skirts and philology escaped me for a considerable time; but at last I worked it out. If the young lady in question came from our graduate school at the University of Missouri, as I half suspect, she acquired the unlovely habit which shocked this dean's wife so much from holding in her lap the bulky volumes of our new *Oxford English Dictionary*.

The other beautiful sister in the English family, Composition, is sometimes equally unkind to Cinderella. Composition is the practical member of the household, and *her* one aim in life is to get results. What irritates her is Cinderella's habit of dreaming as she sits in the ashes—of playing with abstractions and theories, strange terms and complicated diagrams and odd-looking symbols, things that have no obvious or immediate connection with those all-important aims which Composition likes to think of always in capital letters, namely, Better Speech and Better Writing. She has grave suspicions about the value of technical grammar and the use of diagrams, and often wonders whether her pupils would not write better if they never learned the meaning of grammatical terms at all. We have some students in our Freshman English courses at the University whose youthful minds have been effectively shielded from the slightest contamination. One of them defined a preposition the other day as "one of those things a business man makes when he wants to sell you something"; and another thought that a restrictive clause was "one of the blue laws invented by the Puritans." Evidently Composition, pure and undefiled, has had an undisturbed chance with these students. But, strange to say, they do not indicate by the grace and power of their writing or the eloquence of their speech that they have become at all well acquainted with her, or ever dreamed of falling in love with her.

Grammatical terminology is bad enough, but even worse in the eyes of some practical-minded educators is another little device of Cinderella's, namely, the use of phonetic symbols. I can well remember an experience which a student of mine told me she had a good many years ago when she was trying to teach French to a high-school class. She said she had found the study of phonetics so helpful herself that she ventured to use a little of it in explaining

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some of the strange sounds of the French language to her class, and actually went so far as to put some of the phonetic symbols for these sounds on the blackboard. Just after the hour was over, the superintendent, an earnest seeker for results, came into the classroom and caught sight of her strange-looking symbols. They acted upon him very much as the proverbial red rag does upon the bull. "What are those things?" he asked, pointing at them with a shaking forefinger. And when she explained, he said in a voice of thunder, "Never let me see anything like them in this schoolroom again! If you can't make your pupils learn French by writing the letters right side up, you will never do it by turning them upside down!"

"Back to the kitchen, Cinderella," the sisters were wont to cry in the old fairy-tale, whenever visitors came to the house. "You may be good enough to carry out the ashes, but we don't want you in the parlor when prospective suitors are calling on us." And, after all, perhaps the two elder sisters had a certain amount of justification for their attitude in the earlier part of the story. A younger sister like Cinderella would be a trial to any young ladies who wished to make their entry into aristocratic society. Before the visit of her fairy godmother, I can imagine her a girl with plain, strong features, rough, chapped hands, and a soiled gingham apron, with coal smuts on her face and cinders in her hair. The fact that she also had an unsuspected amount of intelligence and a kind heart naturally counted for very little in her favor, till the day came when her godmother provided her with fashionable clothes and took her out to see a beauty specialist. But after the transformation had been effected, there was by no means so much excuse for the way they continued to treat her.

What our critics are really, and quite rightly, objecting to is dogmatism in the teaching of language; but they do it much too dogmatically. They are one and all blissfully unaware that the sort of linguistic study to which they take exception is now a thing of the past. The old dogmatic, prescriptive attitude toward language deserved most of the hard things they say about it. But that sort of philology passed away in all well-informed quarters more than fifty years ago; and if it lingers on anywhere today it is only in the backwoods and in the minds of these self-same critics. As Grattan de-

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clares in his stimulating little manual entitled *Our Living Language,* there is as much difference between the old grammar and the new as there is between astrology and astronomy, or between alchemy and chemistry. Probably when Dr. Burgum went to school the grammar that was administered to him was still in the astrological stage. No wonder he hated it! But he really ought to take a look at Cinderella as she is today. I think he would find that she has become a different girl.

In other words, the only trouble with our critics is that they are so deplorably out of date. They remind us of the individual whom we have all encountered, who boasts proudly that he has no creed, and no use for such a thing; and then who presently discloses that the creed he really lives and thinks by is one that was exploded and abandoned some time before the Council of Nicea. The man who declares that he despises metaphysics is usually one who really holds a particularly crude and illogical variety of metaphysics. The enemies of grammar never by any chance give a sign that they are acquainted with any more modern grammarians than good old Lindley Murray. Since Lindley Murray's day, if they only knew it, a good deal of water has run under the grammatical mill.

The fairy godmother who has worked the miracle in Cinderella's case is, of course, modern historical scholarship. The pumpkin coach was built by men like Henry Sweet and Lounsbury and Jespersen, and among the beauty specialists who are laying on the finishing touches are our own American scholars, McKnight and Fries and Kenyon. It would be entirely superfluous to mention here all the details of the transformation, but perhaps we may find the essence of the new philology in the idea that language is alive. The most vital of all our human possessions, in every one of its departments, it obeys the law of life, which is growth and change. The old-fashioned grammarian knew, perhaps, that language changes, but he hated to admit it, and he usually concealed it most effectually from his pupils. The modern teacher makes the conception of language as a living organism, a thing of growth and development, the very center of his teaching; and he lets it work the same revolution which the conception of evolution and organic growth has worked so fundamentally in every other branch of human knowledge.

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Modern grammar, accordingly, has ceased altogether to be a thing of fixed principles and formal logic, and has become rather akin to fashion and to etiquette. Here the allegory of Cinderella and her fashionable clothes is peculiarly apt. The up-to-date English teacher no longer tells his pupils that bad grammar is a direct violation of the Ten Commandments. Not that he fears they may some day read the Ten Commandments and find the subject of grammar unmentioned there. He merely prefers to tell them the truth about it, and the truth happens to be something that makes grammar far more interesting and important to our modern young people than it ever used to be. When they discover that good grammar is really just a chapter in that Bible of the younger generation, the *Book of Etiquette,* they will no longer have to be driven to study it. When that day comes, the only way the young prince can be kept away from Cinderella will be by forcible means.

The most attractive quality about Cinderella in the old fairy tale was her kind heart. After she married her prince, we are told, she returned the jealousy and ill will of her sisters by bringing them to court and doing everything in her power to introduce them to eligible suitors. And when the study of language wins its rightful place in the curriculum and is recognized as an equal member of the English family, there are many little helps and kindnesses which it will extend to the more efficient teaching both of composition and literature. An instance of the sort of assistance which it may render came to my attention only a few weeks ago. A certain department of speech, in a senior high school not a thousand miles away, has been conducting an earnest and much needed campaign for improved pronunciation. One thing they have been a trifle too earnest about, however, is insisting on a particular variety of *a* sound in such words as *bath* and *dance* and *drama*—the so-called "refined" *à* sound. Their students are all required to say *bàth* and *dànce* and *dràma;* and any student in that school who takes the traditional Middle Western *băth* or indulges in one of our customary *dănces* will thereby, it has been reported, automatically incur the penalty of failure in the course. I feel sure that just a little study of phonetics and the history of English pronunciation would be of genuine service to this well-meaning group of teachers, and would help them to concentrate their attention on the many vulgarisms and atrocious

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lapses in pronunciation that really need their efforts. They would learn how all three varieties of the *a* sound—*dăn*ce and *dàn*ce and *dân*ce—have succeeded each other in the usage of cultured speakers, how each one of them has been thought at different times and certain circles to be the most "refined," and how each of them is used today by people of the most fastidious refinement. In short, they are wasting powder and shot on a target they will never hit and one that is not worth hitting, while all the time the woods are full of promising game calling loudly for execution.

A little knowledge of linguistics may prove useful even to educational reformers. The doughtiest crusader against Aryan roots can better his case considerably if he learns how to recognize a root when he sees one. If he falls back on arguments from etymology, as people who are ignorant of etymology are especially fond of doing, Cinderella will be delighted to help him avoid the pitfalls of false etymology. Not long ago I read an eloquent plea by an assiduous reformer against imposing the crushing categories of grammar on the tender minds of children; and just in the middle of it there was introduced that hoary old argument from the etymology of the word *education.* The very word *education* itself comes, we are told, from the Latin *ēdūcĕre,* to *draw or lead out;* then is it not self-evident that all rational education must be *drawn out* of the student and never poured into him? Now it happens that the word *education* does not come from *ēdūcĕre* at all! If it did, we should have in English the form *eduction,* not *education (dūcō, dūcĕre, dūxī, dŭctus).* It comes instead from another Latin verb, somewhat similar in appearance and doubtless remotely related, but belonging to the first conjugation instead of the third—the verb *ēdŭcāre;* and, curiously enough, *ēdŭcāre* meant, not to *draw out,* but to *nourish* or *feed.* The benighted Romans thought of education as a process of feeding or nourishing, rather than tooth-drawing. No doubt our educational reformers are at least partly right in maintaining that knowledge should be extracted from the student instead of being always administered to him; but they ought to recognize it as a new process, and call it *eduction,* not *education.*

My discovery of the true meaning of the Cinderella story would not be complete without the identification of the famous glass slipper. Now by a circumstance that seems truly appropriate, this very

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glass slipper had its origin in a false etymology. This, to my mind, affords the final proof that my interpretation of the legend is correct. It was originally a fur slipper, not a glass one (Perrault's *pantoufle en vair* being mistaken for *en verre*) as might be expected in the case of so sensible a girl as Cinderella. But whatever the material of its composition, its presence in the story shows that the inspired author was keenly aware of the need for some sure and certain mark of identification to discriminate true Cinderellas from false ones. Philology, too, needs, and needs badly, a proof of genuineness to distinguish her from the many imposters who have stolen her name and brought her into disrepute.

Perhaps the glass slipper in her case is simply a touch of imagination. Imagination is the last quality, it is true, which a teacher of language is popularly supposed to possess, but it is precisely the faculty which was most distinctive in all the great philologists, from Grimm to Gildersleeve, and it is the one thing the linguist must possess if he is to have a genuine realization that language is alive, with all its implications. If we could only invent some sort of imagination test, instead of an intelligence test, to try on prospective philologists, like a slipper, we might be able to eliminate the offenders who have done most to give our profession a bad name. No one who thinks of words as dead has any business with the dictionary anyway, and any teacher who lets slip the hidden conviction that grammar means for him the grave clothes of language should be forever debarred from teaching grammar to children. And the same sort of test might very usefully be applied to people who propose to write articles on the "Modern Dry-as-Dust"—together with an intelligence test as well.

One way to apply the test would be to find out whether the prospect takes any interest in fairy-stories. If it seems strange to him that Grimm, the founder of modern philology and the discoverer of the great law that forms its cornerstone, should also have been the man who rediscovered the fairy-tales and spent his life in collecting them—and not rather the most natural thing in the world, as it was —then let him keep his hands off the science and the teaching of language. Perhaps a good way to begin the test would be to read and expound to him the fairy tale of Cinderella.

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